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THE ALLEGORY OF THE PEARL

A fitting subtitle for the *Pearl* would be *Paradise Regained*. The poet declares how that which Adam lost the Christian may recover. The blood and water which flowed from Christ's wounds, and still mystically flow in the wine of communion and the water of baptism, have washed away all impediments between mankind and its forfeited bliss.

'Inoze is knawen þat mankyn grete
Fyrste wat; wroȝt to blysse parfyt;
Oure forme fader hit con forfete
Þur; an apple þat he vpon con byte;
Al wer we dampned for þat mete
To dyȝe in doel out of delyt,
& syþen wende to helle hete,
þerinne to won wythoute respyt.
Bot þer oncom a bote as-tyt;
Ryche blod ran on rode so roghe,
& wynne water þen at þat plyt;
þe grace of God wex gret innoghe.

'Innoghe þer wax out of þat welle,
Blod & water of brode wounde:
þe blod vus boȝt fro bale of helle,
& delyvered vus of þe deth secounde;
þe water is baptem, þe soþe to telle,
þat folȝed þe glayue so grymly grounde,
þat wascheȝ away þe gylteȝ felle
þat Adam wyth inne deth vus drounde.
Now is þer noȝt in þe worlde rounde
Bytwene vus & blysse bot þat he wythdroȝ,
& þat is restored in sely stounde,
& þe grace of God is gret innogh.¹

Man is made one in body and spirit with Christ.

'Of courtaysye, as sayt; Saynt Paule,
Al arn we membreȝ of Jesu Kryst;
As heued & arme & legg & naule
Temen to hys body ful trwe & tyste,
Ryȝt so is vch a Krysten sawle
A longande lym to þe Mayster of myste.²

¹ Stanzas liv-lv.

² ll. 457-462. Obviously, the poet means that we are attached in all our parts—extremities and middle, or “navel”—to the divine body. Osgood (ed. *Pearl*, Boston, 1906, note to l. 459) renders “naule” as “nail,” declaring “navel”

But to continue truly one with Christ we must act as He. Since He gave all for us, we must give all for Him. So the *Pearl*-maiden exhorts:

'I rede þe forsake þe worlde wode,
& porchase þy perle maskelles.³

Her words imply the parable of which the poem is chiefly an allegorical interpretation.⁴ As to the primary signification of the "pretiosa margarita" in the parable the poet is explicit. Christ had said: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Who-soever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."⁵ So the poet:

'Jesus con calle to hym hys mylde,
& sayde hys ryche no wy; myȝt wynne
Bot he com þyder ryȝt as a chylde,
Oþer elle; neuer more com þerinne.
Harmleȝ, trwe, & vndefylde,
Wythouten mote oþer mascle of sulpande synne—
Quen such þer cnoken on þe bylde,
Tyt schal hem men þe ȝate vnpynne.
þer is þe blys þat con not blynne
þat þe jueler soȝte þurȝ perre pres,
& solde alle hys goud, boȝe wolen & lynne,
To bye hym a perle watȝ mascelleȝ.⁶

To win the Pearl is to win back innocence, the quality of the little child. Without innocence, that "pretiosa margarita," which costs all else that one has in this world, none can enter heaven.

repugnant to phonology, sense, and poetic delicacy. The matter of phonology I leave to experts, but submit that the translation 'nail' makes nonsense. I assume that nail of the Cross is intended, and not a coalescence of finger-nail and toe-nail. But, according to the text, "naule" is not a means of attachment, but a thing attached. As to "poetic delicacy," the objection is one more illustration of a lack of historical perspective strangely common among our most learned. Medieval writers saw nothing indelicate in the navel. Albertus Magnus, among others, compares the Virgin Mary's navel to a wine-cup in the hand of the Holy Ghost (*De Laud. B. Mar. Virg.* V, ii, 68).

³ ll. 734-744.

⁴ Matth. xiii, 45-46.

⁵ Matt. xviii, 3-4.

⁶ st. lxi.

Innocence is not only the quality which wins heaven, it is also the quality of heaven. As Christ had said:

To such is heuenrych arayed.⁷

And the poet makes the comparison:

“This maskelle; perele, þat boȝt is dere,
þe joueler gef fore alle hys god,
Is like þe reme of heuenesse clere;”
So sayde þe Fader of folde & flode;
For hit is wemle; clene, & clere,
& ende; rounde, & blyþe of mode,
& commune to alle þat ryȝtwys were.⁸

In other words, the same physical qualities of spotlessness, clarity, beauty, roundness,⁹ which, subjectively regarded, make the gem a natural symbol of innocence, also suggest in miniature the empyrean heaven.¹⁰ Accordingly, the “pearl of great price,” borne on the bosoms of the 144,000 maiden queens,¹¹ brides of the supreme Innocent,¹² the Lamb, is taken at once of their merit, innocence, and of their reward of merit,—heaven, or the bliss of heaven. Naturally, also, the “righteous” in heaven wear the pearl, since without it they could not be in heaven. But the innocence of the “righteous” is not the pure innocence of the little child, whose one blot of original sin has been washed away in baptism. The child is “saf by ryȝt,”¹³ that is, by merit of innocence. Grace is sufficient to make good its defect of good works.¹⁴ But the righteous man is in really worse case respecting the merit of good works. However many he count to his credit, the balance is surely against him.

“Where wyste; þou euer any bourne abate
Euer so holy in hys prayere

⁷ l. 719.

⁸ ll. 733-739.

⁹ As the perfect form, the sphere symbolizes innumerable excellences,—among others, simplicity and cleanness. So, for example, Albertus Magnus: “. . . quoniam orbicularis figura sine angulis est, quibus duplicitas figuratur, simplicitatem designat.” Also, “sicut dicit beatus Bernardus, ubi. . . angulus, ibi procul dubio sordes, sive rubigo.” (*De Laud. B. Mar. Virg.* VII, i, 1).

¹⁰ Dante calls the Moon the “eterna margarita.” (*Par.* ii, 34).

¹¹ ll. 740, 785-786, 865-870, 854-856.

¹² Commenting on the text, *Rev.* xiv, 1-4, which is the poet’s authority, Albertus says: “*Et vidi, et ecce Agnus stabat supra montem Sion, id est Christus, qui est agnus per innocentiam, quasi iuvare paratus.*” (*Op. cit.* VI, xiii, 1).

¹³ The refrain of sect. xii.

¹⁴ Cf. st. liii.

þat he ne forfeted by sumkyn gate
 þe mede sumtyme of heuene; clere?
 & ay þe ofter, þe alder þay were,
 & ay laften ryȝt & wroȝten woghe.
 Mercy & grace moste hem þen stere,
 For þe grace of God is gret innoȝe.¹⁵

At the bar of pure Justice, while neither can safely stand by the merit of good works, the little child is really innocent, the righteous man is only constructively so by the fiat of divine Mercy. At most, by contrition he has humbled himself *as* a little child. In other words, he is not *by nature* one with the perfect exemplar of Innocence, Christ, as is the little child.

Thus, unexpectedly, in the argument of the *Pearl*, the glorified child turns the tables upon her doubting interlocutor. He had voiced the time-honored protest of common sense against the equal wage of the eleventh-hour laborer:

"That cortayse is to fre of dede,
 ȝyf hyt be soth þat þou coneȝ saye;
 þou lyfed not two ȝer in oure þede;
 þou cowþeȝ neuer God nauþer plese ne pray,
 Ne neuer nawþer Pater ne Crede.
 & quen mad on þe fyrst day!
 I may not traw, so God me spede,
 þat God wolde wryþe so wrange away;
 Of countes, damysel, par ma fay,
 Wer fayr in heuen to halde asstate,
 Aþer elleȝ a lady of lasse aray;
 Bot a quene!—hit is to dere a date."¹⁶

She answers, at first conventionally enough, by the orthodox interpretation of the parable of the Vineyard.¹⁷ Her interlocutor, still unconvinced, declares her "tale vnresounable," and quotes Scripture on his side:

"þou quyteȝ vchon as hys desserte,
 þou hyȝe Kyng ay pretermynable."¹⁸

At this, the maid springs her surprise. She says, in effect: if you raise the question of "deserts," what are the deserts of the laborer in God's vineyard of this world? The longer he works, the more he mars. He accumulates, therefore, not more

¹⁵ ll. 616-624.

¹⁶ st. xli.

¹⁷ Matt. xx, 1-16. *Pearl*, sts. xlii-xlix.

¹⁸ ll. 595-596. *Ps.* lxi, 12-12.

wages, but more fines. At the end of the day, instead of God owing him the penny agreed upon, he probably owes God several pennies. Only,

þe grace of God is gret innoþe,

not only to remit the debt, but to pay the originally promised penny of eternal life.¹⁹ I, on the other hand, called back from this miry world before I could be soiled by it, have the greatest of all deserts—likeness to the spotless kingdom whence I sprang, likeness to the unsullied Lamb, the pure Innocent, Jesus Christ. By deserts, therefore, “by ryȝt,” the reward of the full penny is mine,—once indeed my one fine for the sin of my father Adam has been remitted by my Lord’s Atonement, repeated for me in baptism.²⁰

The poet of the *Pearl* is a mystic. His solution of the problem of salvation is the mystic solution. His heavenly maiden advises:

‘I rede þe forsake þe worlde wode,
& porchase þy perle maskelles.’²¹

If the world, the worldly self, is the great impediment to salvation, blessed indeed are they who die as little children, for whom this “worlde wode” hardly exists. *Beati pauperes spiritu*.

In the poet’s dream, the babe that was appears as a maiden of surpassing loveliness, in shining white raiment, pearl-bedecked, and wearing a regal crown,

Hiȝe pynakled of cler quyt perle,
Wyth flurtd flowres perfet vpon.²²

So are the “poor in spirit” enriched, and the humble exalted.²³ The Dreamer asks who formed her beauty, and fashioned her raiment.²⁴ The maiden replies that it was Christ, her “maskelez Lambe,” who

‘calde me to hys bonerte:
“Cum hyder to me, my lemman swete,

¹⁹ st. lii.

²⁰ sts. liii- lx.

²¹ ll. 743-744.

²² ll. 207-208.

²³ Cf. St. Thomas, *In Quaest. disput. de Potentia*, q. vi, 9: “Paupertas meretur regnum et divitias spirituales, et humilitas meretur exaltationem et dignitates coelestes.”

²⁴ st. lxiii.

For mote ne spot is non in þe."
 He gef me myȝt & als bewte;
 In hys blod he wesh my wede on dese,
 & coronde clene in vergynte,
 & pyȝt me in perleȝ maskelleȝ."²⁵

In the strikingly parallel passage in Boccaccio's *Eclogue*, Olympia gives credit for similar benefits to the Virgin. Silvius, whose rôle is altogether correspondent to that of the Dreamer of the *Pearl*, asks:

'Dic munere cujus
 Inter texta auro vestis tibi candida flavo?'

And Olympia replies:

'Has vestes formamque dedit faciemque coruscam
 Parthenos, secumque fui.'²⁶

In fact, the poet of the *Pearl* pays as great tribute to the Virgin, but in subtler fashion. According to him, Christ makes over the risen babe in the image of Mary, and crowns her in betrothal with the very words attributed to Him, when crowning Mary:

'Cum hyder to me, my lemman swete,
 For mote ne spot is non in þe.'^{26a}

The words are those of *Cantic.* iv, 7-8: "Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te. Veni de Libano, sponsa mea, veni de Libano, veni, coronaberis." In his monumental *De Laudibus B. Mariae Virginis Libri XII*,²⁷ Albertus Magnus gives elaborate interpretations of this text. He says, among other things: "Dicit ergo [Christus]: Veni, amica, id est, conscia secretorum, ut tibi revelem secreta, quae nec oculus vidit nec auris audivit, etc."²⁸ Veni, sponsa, ad thalamum sponsi tui immortalis, ne ab ipso de caetero separeris. . . Veni, humilis ancilla, ut fias sublimis regina. *Qui enim humiliatus fuerit,*

²⁵ ll. 762-768.

²⁶ ll. 59 et seq.

^{26a} ii. 763-764.

²⁷ *Op. Omn.*, ed. Borgnet, Par., 1898, XXXVI. The work is a veritable thesaurus of symbolic lore concerning the Virgin. I use it for that reason, neither asserting nor denying that the poet of the *Pearl* used it directly.

²⁸ The maiden declares herself

'Sesed in alle hys herytage [l. 417]; and asserts of herself and her peers, that 'We þurȝoutly hauen cnawynȝ' [l. 859].

erit in gloria [Job. xxii, 29]: et ancillae debetur exaltatio tanto major, et locus sublimior, quanto ipsa ancilla humilior."²⁹

Mary is not only supreme queen in heaven, but also empress of the three kingdoms of heaven, earth, and hell. She is the "Quene of cortaysye";³⁰ the *Pearl*-maiden is queen by courtesy. Mary is empress:

Dat Emperise al heuene; hat
& vrpe & helle in her bayly.³¹

So, according to Albertus, at her Assumption Christ pronounced Mary: "Dixit, inquam, ei sicut legitur, Esther, xv, 14: *Accede, et tange sceptrum*. Accede huc, et tene sceptrum, accipe regiam dignitatem, esto domina coeli et terrae, esto regina et imperatrix Angelorum et hominum, sede a dextris meis in gloria, quae semper adstitisti a dextris meis serviens pro aeternis, in vestitu deaurato, id est, corpore immaculato."³² And again: "Regnum autem Christi et Mariae quod ideo regnum est, extenditur et continet quasi tres provincias, coelestium, terrestrium, et infernorum."³³

Because of her infinite love of Christ, Mary is made over into His likeness.³⁴ She is not only His "sister," but even His twin sister.³⁵ Obviously, then, between Olympia's accrediting her transfiguration to Mary, and the *Pearl*-maiden accrediting her transfiguration to Christ, there is a distinction without a difference. And both, in sex, belong with Mary. In fact, the poet of the *Pearl* paints his glorified maiden in the very colors of the symbolic portraits of Mary. She appears to him a vision of white and gold.

²⁹ XII, vii, vi, 4. Cf. III, xiv: *Maria in coelis coronata*; V, i: *De spirituali pulchritudine Mariae*; VI, vi: *Maria sponsa*; VI, xiii: *Maria regina*.

³⁰ l. 456. Cf. Dante's "donna de la cortesia." (*Vita Nuova* xii, 10.)

³¹ ll. 441-442.

³² *Op. cit.* III, xiv.

³³ *Op. cit.* VI, xiii, 3.

³⁴ Albert. Mag., *op. cit.* IV, xvii, 1: "Et nota, quod *dilectio* dicitur quasi duos ligans, diligentem videlicet rei quam diligit, id est, amantem amato: est enim amor amantis et amati quasi quaedam unio potissimum in bonis, et naturaliter illud quod amatur, in sui naturam suam convertit amatorem." And, specifically, Mary's "pulchritudines quasi derivantur a pulchritudinibus sponsi, a quo sponsa recipit totam suam pulchritudinem: quia sponsus pulcher est per naturam, sponsa pulchra est per gratiam." (lb. V, i, 3.)

³⁵ Cf. Albert. Mag. *op. cit.* VI, iii: *Maria soror*.

Blysnande whyt wat; hyr bleaunt. . . .
 As glysnande golde þat man con schere,
 So schon þat schene anvnder schore.³⁶

He compares her whiteness to that of ivory:

Hyr vysage whyt as playn yuore.³⁷

"Ebur castitas," explains Albertus, ". . . aurum humilitas. . . Anima enim Mariae et corpus quasi de ebore per virtutem integerrimae virginitatis, virtutes ejus corpus ejus adornantes quasi aurum."³⁸ Again, the poet compares the maiden's whiteness to that of the lily:

þy colour passeþ þe flour-de-lys.³⁹

So Mary "propter candorem comparatur ipsa lilio, Cantic. ii, 2: *Sicut liliū inter spinas*, etc." And Albertus immediately adds the apposite moral interpretation: "Moraliter: Fideli animae necessarius est candor innocentiae."⁴⁰ Innocence is the one and sufficient virtue of the *Pearl*-maiden. Once more, the hue of the maiden is likened to that of pearl, not pallid, but warm with rose color:

Her depe colour ȝet wonted non
 Of precios perle in porfyl pyȝte.⁴¹

Osgood says, "This mingling of white and red is a convention."⁴² So it is,—and also, symbolically, of the Virgin. And the "faithful soul" is fitly colored in her likeness. "In frontis planitie et candore, quo scilicet frons quandoque perfunditur quasi quodam roseo rubore, designatur verecundia Virginis. Planities se habet ad simplicitatem, candor ad munditiam, rubor ad charitatem. Frons autem fidelis animae erubescencia nominis Christiani et verecundia, ne audeat scilicet cogitare, loqui, audire, vel facere

³⁶ ll. 163, 165-166.

³⁷ l. 178. Also, l. 212: 'Her ble more blaȝt þen whalleȝ bon.'

³⁸ *Op. cit.* X, ii, 9. Cf. X, ii, 5: 'Maria *eburnea*: quia ebur est os elephantis, . . . prius obscurum sed quibusdam instrumentis elimatum artificiose, redditur candidum et lucidum. Sic Maria quando concepta est, obscura fuit per originale, sed subtili sancti Spiritus artificio candida et lucida facta est in sanctificatione: et tunc data est ei gloria Libani, qui interpretatur *candor* vel *candidatio*.'

³⁹ l. 753.

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.* V, ii, 19.

⁴¹ ll. 215-216. Cf. Beatrice's "color di perle . . . non for misura." (*Vita Nuova*, xix, 66-67).

⁴² Ed. *Pearl*, l. 215 note.

aliquid inhonestum, aut nutu, aut signo, aut gestu, seu riso."⁴³ Not only is the maiden goldenly radiant, but her hair is specifically like spun gold.

As schorne golde schyr her fax penne schon.⁴⁴

So is the Virgin's hair, signifying her "golden thoughts." "Ratione capillorum comparatur Maria, Cantic. IV, 14: *Nardus et crocus*, etc. Crocus enim crines habet aureos, quales ad litteram Virginem credimus habuisse, et tales vidimus in reliquiis apud Rothomagum. Vere enim cogitationes ejus fuerunt aureae: quia dependentes et ortum habentes in capite aureo deitatis, etc."⁴⁵ This quality of gold in the maid is due to the infusion of the virtues of the Virgin. "Aurum pulcherrimum metallorum: caetera metalla, caeterae virgines, vel caeteri sancti, de quibus format Dominus vasa gloriae, quos omnes olorat et insignit pulchritudo virtutum Mariae."⁴⁶ Because Mary is without taint of sin, she is of the very purest gold. "Mundissimum aurum est carere fomite peccati, quod nullus habuit praeter beatam Virginem. Unde congrue attribuitur ei superlativus gradus."⁴⁷ The baptized little child in heaven asserts the same of itself:

'Maskelles,' quod þat myry quene,
'Vnblemyst I am, wythouten blot,
& þat may I wyth mensk menteene."⁴⁸

Naturally, also, the babe is virginal, "coronde clene in vergynte."⁴⁹ There would be, however, a distinction. There is no personal merit in the unconscious babe's sinlessness and virginity, whereas in the Virgin Mary these qualities represent a victory. Although she was immune from the lusts of the flesh, yet, like Christ himself, she had to withstand the temptations of Satan.⁵⁰ So, according to St. Thomas, the innocent babe,

⁴³ Albert. Mag., *op. cit.* V. ii, 7. Hence, also, the appellative of "rose" for both Mary and the maiden. *Pearl*, ll. 269, 906. *De Laud.* XII, iv, 34.

⁴⁴ l. 213.

⁴⁵ Albert. Mag., *op. cit.* V, ii, 5.

⁴⁶ Albertus Mag., *op. cit.* X, ii, 10.

⁴⁷ *Ib.*

⁴⁸ ll. 781-783.

⁴⁹ l. 767.

⁵⁰ Cf. St. Thomas, *Sent.* IV, d. xlix, q. v, a. 3, q. 1, 2^{ae}.

dying after baptism, would lack the reward of victory, the aureole of virginity, but would have a "special joy of innocence and integrity of the flesh."⁵¹ So the maid asserts:

'More haf I of ioye & blysse hereinne,
Of ladyschyp gret & lyve; blom,
Den alle þe wy;e; in þe worlde myȝt wynne
By þe way of ryȝt to aske dome.'⁵²

As brides of the Lamb, both Mary and the maiden are clothed "in linen (byssu), clean and white," as declared in *Rev. xix*, 7-8. The poet notes that

Blysnande whyt wat; hyr bleaunt;⁵³

and again:

Al blysnande whyt wat; hir bleaunt of biys.⁵⁴

Identifying the first nuptials of the Lamb with the Incarnation, Albertus interprets the text of *Revelations*: "*Venerunt nuptiae Agni*, id est, tempus carnem assumendi. *Et uxor ejus praeparavit se*, id est reddidit idoneam, ut de ipsa carnem assumeret. Praeparavit, inquam, per libertatem arbitrii. Sed quia hoc non sufficit sine adjutorio gratiae, subdit, v. 8: *Et datum est illi ut cooperiat se bysso*, id est, castitati, *splendenti* ad alios per exemplum, et *candido* quoad se, et hoc maxime quando vovit virginitatem."⁵⁵ And Mary, in turn, confers upon her faithful the "vestem candidam sine admixtione maculae mortalis," the "byssum [qui] candidam significat innocentiam."⁵⁶ Again, at her second nuptials, her Coronation, in the greeting of the Bridegroom, "Veni de Libano, coronaberis," the word Libanus is interpreted to mean "whiteness" in several symbolic senses.⁵⁷ Finally,

⁵¹ *Sent.* IV, d. xxxiii, q. iii, a. 3, 3^m: "Aureola est premium accidentale de operibus perfectionis, secundum perfectam victoriam. *Sent.* IV, d. xlix, q. v, a. 3, q. 1, c. fi.: "Puer moriens post baptismum, habet speciale gaudium de innocentia, et de integritate carnis. Non autem habet proprie aureolam virginitatis."

⁵² ll. 577-580.

⁵³ l. 163.

⁵⁴ l. 197, Osgood's reading.

⁵⁵ *Op. cit.* VI, vii, 1.

⁵⁶ *Op. cit.* II, i, 15.

⁵⁷ "Libanus interpretatur albus, candidus, candor, candidatio, quia in significatis istorum quatuor habitabat Virgo quando vocabatur ad coronam. Erat enim alba et candida per duplicem virginitatem, vel per puritatem et innocentiam, quae duo signantur in candore. Erat etiam candor substantiva,

the maiden's garments, as well as her crown, are richly ornamented with pearls.⁵⁸ Mary, as Virgin, is "universarum virtutum margaritis adornata."⁵⁹ The maiden, indeed, wears only pearls.

A ryȝt coroune ȝet wer þat gyrl
Of marioyrs & non oþer ston.⁶⁰
Pyȝt & poyned at vche a hemme,
At honde, at sydeȝ, at ouerture,
Wyth whyte perle & non oþer gemme.⁶¹

The gems that Mary wears symbolize her virtues, and these she confers upon her faithful ones.⁶² Adorned with these gems, faithful souls are received into heaven as queens, crowned by the Bridegroom even like Mary herself. Such Albertus presents as the moral sense of the scriptural account of the reception by King Solomon of the Queen of Sheba, which account anagogically signifies the Assumption and Coronation of Mary. The passage is singularly apposite to the dramatic symbolism of the *Pearl*,—except that the "faithful soul" in the poem, the little child, is bedecked with but one gem, one virtue, the pearl of innocence, yet sufficient and supreme. Albertus says: "Moraliter: Vis ut anima tua introeat in supernam Jerusalem, et veniat in morte ad verum Salomonem, oportet ut sit regina non serva peccati . . . oportet etiam ut regina ista habeat aurum quadruplex, scilicet aurum castitatis, charitatis, sapientiae, et

non solum adjectiva, quia *candor est lucis aeterna, et speculum sine macula*. Et ab isto candore candescit quidquid candidum est. . . . Erat et est candidatio: quia nigros peccatores qui divinam peccando amiserunt similitudinem impetrandi eis a Filio gratiam compunctionis, misericorditer candidat et dealbat." (Albert. Mag., *op. cit.* XII, vii, vi, 4). Cf *Pearl*, l. 766:

'in hys blod he wesch my wede on dese.'

In the last analysis, for Albertus also, Christ is really the one who cleanses by his Atonement. But, on the other hand, my whole line of argument goes to show that the poet of the *Pearl* also believed in the necessary mediation of the Virgin.

⁵⁸ Sts. 17-18.

⁵⁹ Albert. Mag. *op. cit.* IV, ix, 7.

⁶⁰ ll. 205-206.

⁶¹ ll. 217-219.

⁶² "Gemmae istae virtutes designant, scilicet humilitatem, castitatem, pietatem, justitiam, fortitudinem, prudentiam, temperantiam, et hujus modi, quibus Maria per gratiam ornat amatores et imitatores suos." (Albert. Mag., *op. cit.* VI, xiii, 4).

obedientiae. . . Oportet etiam ut habeat gemmas pretiosas, id est, virtutes. De isto enim auro et gemmis istis componitur corona reginae, id est, fidelis animae. Alioquin impossibile est ipsam ante veri Salomonis faciem pervenire."⁶³

By an easy shift from the quality possessed to the possessor of the quality, the Pearl, which signifies innocence, is made also to signify the innocent one. The poet addresses the glorified maiden:

'O perle,' quod I, 'in perle; py;t,
Art þou my perle þat I haf playned,
Regretted by myn one, on ny;te'⁶⁴

And she acknowledges the identity.

'Sir, ȝe haf your tale mysetente,
To say your perle is al awaye.
þat is in cofer so comly clente
As in þis gardyn gracios gaye,
Hereinne to lenge for euer & play'⁶⁵

So Mary is also figured in the pearl of the parable. "Ipsa est enim pretiosa margarita, pro quo omnia quae habentur, vendenda sunt ut ematur, id est, omnia emolumenta vitae praesentis contemnenda, ut ei serviatur."⁶⁶ The maid's advice—

'I rede þe forsake þe worlde wode,
& porchase þy perle maskelles,—'⁶⁷

would be followed if the penitent faithfully served the Virgin. A hint to this effect is also given in the poet's declaration that his vision was vouchsafed to him

In Augoste in a hy; seysoun.⁶⁸

This "hy; seysoun," or feastday, would be that of the Assumption; and the coincidence would indicate her merciful intercession.⁶⁹ It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance of the part the Virgin played in the faith of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. St. Bernard had said: "Nihil nos Deus

⁶³ *Op. cit.* VI, xiii, 4.

⁶⁴ ll. 241-243.

⁶⁵ ll. 257-261.

⁶⁶ Albert. Mag., *op. cit.* II, iii, 4.

⁶⁷ ll. 743-744.

⁶⁸ l. 39.

⁶⁹ Cf. Osgood, ed. *Pearl*, p. xvi.

habere voluit, quod per Mariae manus non transiret."⁷⁰ She is regarded as dispensing mercy as Christ justice: ". . . saepe quos Filii justitia damnat, matris misericordia liberat. Quae scilicet justitia Filii et misericordia matris videntur sic altercari, quasi dicat justitia Filii: *Ego occidam et percutiam*: misericordia matris respondeat: *Et ego vivere faciam, et manabo*."⁷¹ Mary, it seems, was predestined from the beginning to be the necessary complement to Christ in the scheme of salvation,—to mediate with the Son, as the Son with the Father. "Siquidem deerat nobis advocatus apud Filium antequam Maria nasceretur. Dixit autem Pater, Genes II, 18: *Non est bonum hominem esse solum*, id est, non sufficit unicus advocatus, vel mediator, aut intercessor humano generi in coelo, cum tot et tam periculosas habeat causas coram me. *Faciamus ei adiutorium*, id est, beatam Virginem quae alleget pro genere humano coram Filio, sicut Filius coram me."⁷² Accordingly, "Paradisi porta per Hevam cunctis clausa est, et per Mariam Virginem patefacta est."⁷³

Whether the poet intended it, I cannot say, but there may be a subtler symbolic significance in the dating of his apocalyptic vision:

In Auguste in a hy; seysoun,
Quen corne is coruen wyth croke; kene.⁷⁴

A "hy; seysoun" is a feastday, dies festus; and, declares Albertus, "Dies festus, dies aeternitatis. In ipsa [Maria] enim fuit initium diei festi: quia omnia terrena contempsit supernis inhians."⁷⁵ So fittingly, on Mary's feastday, the poet has his vision of the eternal day, and is told that by "despising all earthly things," he may awake in that eternal day.⁷⁶ Moreover, the mowing of the corn naturally refers to the harvest-time;

⁷⁰ *In Vig. Nat. Dom.*, serm. I, in fine.

⁷¹ Albert Mag., *op. cit.* II, i, 23. Cf. *ib.* VI, xiii, 3: "Regnum Die consistit in duobus, scilicet in misericordia et justitia: et Filius Dei sibi quasi retinuit justitiam velut dimidiam partem regni, matri concessit misericordiam quasi dimidiam aliam partem. Unde et dicitur *regina misericordiae*, et Filius *sol justitiae*."

⁷² Albert. Mag., *op. cit.* II, i, 19.

⁷³ *Ib.* IV, ix, 2.

⁷⁴ ll. 39-40.

⁷⁵ *Op. cit.* VI, i, 2.

⁷⁶ ll. 743-744.

and the eternal day is the great harvest-time, when the "first-fruits" from among men shall be gathered "unto God and to the Lamb."⁷⁷

Mary, as has been said, is identified with the "pearl" of the parable, and to possess her we should be willing to give all the world.⁷⁸ But Albertus carries his application of the parable to bolder praise. To possess that "pearl of great price," God himself gives his all. "Ipsa [Maria] enim est pretiosa illa margarita, quae quasi *singularis* in Evangelio introducitur integra carne, et spiritu, in tantum concupiscibilis, ut divinos animos in se converteret, et, ut tota Dei fieret, in negotiatione absque omni exceptione negotiator coelestis omnia sua distrahit et commutat. Unde canitur: "O admirabile commercium." Margarita etiam ista totum se Deo dedit, et, omnia divina sibi vindicans mutavit. Nam et Deus illam elegit, et in ejus comparatione omnia sua contulit, et quasi pro ipsa habenda expendit omnia sua propria, id est, divina."⁷⁹ And the *Pearl*-maiden appears to declare a similar "commercium" between Christ and herself, the handmaid of Mary:

sesed in alle hys herytage
Hys lef is, I am holy hysse.⁸⁰

And this idea of Christ storing in his golden coffer of paradise the pearl which he has purchased by giving his all,—his life on the Cross,—reappears in the maiden's retort:

'Sir, ȝe haf your tale mysetente,
To say your perle is al awaye,
ȝat is in cofer so comly clente.'⁸¹

Also, implied in the first two lines—

Perle plesaunte to Princes paye,
To clanly clos in golde so clere!—

it strikes the keynote of the whole poem. For to one who understands, these two lines symbolically imply both the means and the reward of salvation: the renouncement of all worldly

⁷⁷ *Rev.* xiv, 4.

⁷⁸ See above, p. 12.

⁷⁹ *Op. cit.* VI, ix, 9.

⁸⁰ ll. 417-418.

⁸¹ ll. 257-259.

things, according to the parable; the so won intercession of Mary, the pearl of mercy; the rebirth in her likeness; the espousal with Christ, or to continue the figure, become a "precious pearl," to lie in his golden coffer secure forever.

In the passage just quoted, Albertus applies to the Virgin the adjective "singularis." It is an epithet virtually consecrated to her. "Unde ei canit Ecclesia:

Virgo singularis,
Inter omnes mitis, etc."⁸²

She is unique in beauty: "vere enim pulcherrima, quae tot habuit in se pulchritudines, quot virtutes et singulas in superlativo gradu. Et ideo vere dicitur *singularis*."⁸³ The poet of the *Pearl* himself uses the term of her:

Now for synglerty o hyr dousour,
We calle hyr Fenyx of Araby.⁸⁴

In the first stanza of the poem, the poet declares of his "perle wythouten spot," that

Queresoeuer I jugged gemme; gaye,
I sette hyr sengeley in syngulere.

This emphasis upon the familiar word must, I think, have arrested at once the attention of any fourteenth century Catho-

⁸² Albert. Mag., *op. cit.* XII, iv, 28. Cf. II, ii, 15; IV, vi, 2; X, ii, 12.

⁸³ *Ib.* V, i, 1. The devotees of the Virgin love to ring changes on the word. Thus Albertus enumerates her unique excellences "in pariendi singularitate. . . . in singulari dominatu super Filium Dei et suum, . . . in singulari actione vel bona operatione, . . . in singulari passione vel martyrio, . . . in singulari transitu vel ascensu de mundo ad Deum, . . . in singulari sepultura, . . . in singulari sublimatione, . . . in singulari consessu ad dexteram Filii, . . . in singulari potestate." (*Op. cit.* IV, iv, 3). Similarly, St. Bonaventure: "Maria singulariter, tam corpore quam anima, est aula Domini, domus Dei sanctissima. . . . O vere singulariter beatam domum, quae sola tam singulariter talem meruit habere Dominum Iste singularis Mariae Dominus sic singulariter cum Maria fuit, quod etiam ipsam tam singulariter dominam fecit, quod nec similem visa est, nec habere sequentem: dum ipsa singulariter; Domini filia, Domini mater, Domini sponsa, et Domini ancilla facta est: Maria enim filia Domini singulariter, generosa mater Domini singulariter, gloriosa sponsa Domini singulariter, pretiosa ancilla Domini singulariter obsequiosa fuit." (*Speculum B. Mar. Virg.*, Lect. X).

⁸⁴ ll. 429-430. Albertus likens the Virgin to the phoenix for another singularity: ". . . Maria una sola est mater et virgo. Unde et comparatur phoenix, quae est unica avis sine patre." (*Op. cit.* VII, iii, 1).

lic reader, and, applied to the immaculate Pearl, have called up before his mind the image of the Virgin. Thus his mind is prepared beforehand for the association to be established between the glorified Innocent and the glorious "mater innocentiae," and what the poet presents as apparently a mere compliment turns out in the sequel to be an inspired prophecy. The device is characteristic of medieval religious allegory. Dante, for instance, in the *Vita Nuova* as in the *Divina Commedia*, constantly employs it. In the principle, of course, the poet so assumes the rôle of the prophets of the Old Testament, spokesmen of truths of which they themselves were unaware.

On the warrant of *Rev.* xiv, 4, the *Pearl*-maiden declares herself to be one of 144,000 in heaven, all, like herself virgin queens fashioned in the diminished likeness of the virgin queen and empress, Mary. And, in the sequel, the Dreamer sees them all in procession, following the Lamb, and singing "a new song." The apocalyptic number is a multiple of twelve, and as such may have been interpreted by the poet to signify the totality of a class.⁸⁵ He surely does not include in this unified throng the whole host of the redeemed. In the first place, in accord with the text, he declares them to be virgins.⁸⁶ The loss of virginity in holy matrimony is certainly no bar to heaven; but not even God can restore virginity lost.⁸⁷ Moreover, the poet does present certain human personages in heaven outside of the virginal procession, namely, the "aldermen," who,

Ryȝt byfore Godeȝ chayere,⁸⁸

wait to receive it. His authority is *Rev.* xiv, 3, and, more fully, IV, 10: "Procidebant viginti quatuor seniores ante sedentem in throno, et adorabant viventem in saecula saeculorum." By medieval theologians, these twenty-four elders were variously,

⁸⁵ So Albertus, *op. cit.* XII, vii, v, 11: "Duodenarius autem numerus est universitatis. . . . Per viginti quatuor sicut et per duodecim sanctorum universitatis figuratur." Cf. Dante's two garlands of twelve doctors in *Par.* x, xii.

⁸⁶ *Rev.* xiv, 4: "Hi sunt, qui cum mulieribus non sunt coinquinati, virgines sunt."

⁸⁷ Cf. St. Thomas, S. T. III, lxxxix, 3, c.: "Innocentia, et tempus amissum, irrecuperabilia." St. Jerome, *Epist. xxii*, ad Eustoch, *De custod. Virginit.* v: "Cum omnia possit Deus, suscitare virginem non potest post ruinam."

⁸⁸ ll. 885, 887, 1119.

but most commonly taken as the Twelve Patriarchs, sons of Jacob, and the Twelve Apostles, spiritual sons of Christ.⁸⁹ Their position, right before God's throne, implies a distinction of rank in heaven, and of itself refutes the notion, declaredly heretical, of a flat democracy, or rather oriental despotism of an absolute royal family ruling a dead level of subjects, attributed to the poet of the *Pearl* by Professor Brown.⁹⁰ Moreover, as Professor Osgood points out, "belief in the equality of heavenly rewards is certainly at variance with the poet's social ideas," and, moreover, the orthodox view is clearly implied in *Purity* (ll. 113-124), a poem almost certainly by him.⁹¹ To suppose, as Professor Osgood does, a sudden change of mind by the poet on so fundamental a dogma is certainly gratuitous unless absolutely demanded. The presumption is against a devout fourteenth-century Catholic acting the heretic; and if he were to do so, he would certainly try to bolster up his position as strongly as possible. In one sense, the poet of the *Pearl* does assert equality of reward. His baptised infant receives the penny, the promised wage, no less than the saint and martyr. The question is what the "penny" of the parable is interpreted, theologically, to mean. According to the common orthodox view, it means salvation, "eternal life" in communion with God. So, for instance, St. Augustine: "Ita quia ipsa vita aeterna pariter erit omnibus sanctis, aequalis denarius omnibus attributus est."⁹² But, as Professor Brown seems, if I understand him, to forget, orthodox writers make a distinction. This eternal "vision of God," the one common reward of all the blest, is the essential reward. So the poet:

De ryztwys mon schal se hys face,
De harmle; habel schal com hym tylle.⁹³

But, while objectively the essential reward is one and equal, subjectively it varies. Just as one man can get more good

⁸⁹ So Albertus, *op. cit.* XII, vii, v, 11: "Duodecim enim Patriarche, scilicet filii Jacob fuerunt in Veteri Testamento, et duodecim Apostoli in Novo, quos Christus luctator noster genuit in passione."

⁹⁰ C. F. Brown, *The Author of the Pearl*, Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc. XIX, pp. 115ff.

⁹¹ Cf. ed. *Pearl*, pp. xxxix-xl.

⁹² *De Sancta Virginitate*, cap. 26, Migne, *Patrol.*, vol. xl, col. 410. Quoted from Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

⁹³ ll. 675-676.

out of a penny than another, so one spirit in the presence of God can realize him more fully than another.⁹⁴ Bearing this distinction in mind, I can find nothing in the poet's argument counter to the orthodox view.

Where in the hierarchy of the blest he would set the baptized infant is another story. In such a question variant views are legitimate enough; for it is a question of opinion, or speculation, not of dogma, or infallible truth. At least, the poet seems to represent the baptized infants as all among themselves on an equal plane. They are all just alike in symbolic appearance. In this view he follows St. Thomas,⁹⁵ and opposes St. Bonaventure and Dante.⁹⁶ According to Dante, the baptized innocents form at least a hierarchy by themselves *below* that of the adult blest. His reason is that in them personal merit is lacking, and must be supplied by another (*altrui*).⁹⁷ By "another," Dante, I think, means Christ. St. Thomas had said: "Nam pueris baptizatis subvenit meritum Christi ad beatitudinem consequendam, licet desint in eis merita propria, eo quod per baptismum sunt Christi membra effecti."⁹⁸ This pronouncement seems to supply the authority for the argument of the *Pearl*. The baptized innocent, child of a father in the faith,⁹⁹ ascribes its salvation entirely to Christ,¹⁰⁰ and claims the salutary effect of baptism indicated by St. Thomas of being made one with Christ.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ Cf. St. Thomas, *S. T.*, I-II, v, 2: "Contingit autem aliquem perfectius frui Deo quam alium, ex eo quod est melius dispositus vel ordinatus ad ejus fruitionem . . . Unitas denarii significat unitatem beatitudinis ex parte objecti; sed diversitas mansionum significat diversitatem beatitudinis secundum diversum gradum fruitionis."

⁹⁵ *S. T.* III, lxi, 8.

⁹⁶ *Par.* xxxii, 40 ff.

⁹⁷ *Ib.* 43-45.

⁹⁸ *S. T.* I-II, v, 7, 2^m, fi. On the strength of *Par.* 76-77, "*Altrui*" is commonly interpreted to mean "the faith of its parents," but to be born in the faith and to be baptized are rather, I think, the "*certe condizioni*" (1.43) prerequisite to salvation.

⁹⁹ Cf. ll. 383-384:

'Bot Crystes mersy & Mary & Jon—
Þise are þe grounde of alle my blysse.'

¹⁰⁰ Cf., e. g., st. liii.

¹⁰¹ Cf. ll. 457-462, quoted above, p. 1.

This entire dependence upon the vicarious merit of Christ apparently appeals to the poet as the perfection of "poverty in spirit." Combined with utter humility¹⁰² and virginity, it forms a perfect defence against the enemies of the spirit,—the world, the flesh, and the devil. So Mary is said to be safe from these three enemies "quia humilis et pauper et virgo fuit."¹⁰³ For these reasons the *Pearl*-maiden declares of herself:

'More haf I of ioye & blysse hereinne,
Of ladyschyp gret & lyve; blom,
þen alle þe wyȝe; in þe worlde myȝt wynne
By þe way of ryȝt to aske dome.'¹⁰⁴

She claims for herself certainly a higher 'accidental reward' of "joy and bliss" than attainable by the "righteous man." The common "penny" means more to her. In claiming also "more

Of ladyschyp gret & lyve; blom,"

I think she means to claim also that greater "clarity" which for orthodox theologians signifies capacity for more perfect fruition of God, and therefore a higher rank, a more exalted "mansion," in heaven.¹⁰⁵ Though higher than the "righteous," the innocent does not rank necessarily highest after the Virgin. As already said, there are the "aldermen," patriarchs and apostles, who are closer to the Throne. Doubtless, the poet would higher exalt also the prophets and martyrs, and probably others. But he is not concerned to edit the social register of paradise. He is discussing only one issue in the problem of the divine reward of merit, namely, the comparative worth for salvation of the vicarious merit of Christ's sacrifice and of the direct individual merit of good works; and he decides in favor of the former.¹⁰⁶ The example of the little child, born in the faith and dying after baptism, is simply an extreme *cas au vif* of one saved by vicarious merit solely.

¹⁰² St. xxxiv.

¹⁰³ Albert. Mag., *op. cit.* I, vii, 14.

¹⁰⁴ ll. 577-580.

¹⁰⁵ The poet's case might be reduced to simple mathematical terms. The innocent's merit is zero; but the righteous man's balance of merit is a minus quantity (ll. 616-124); and a minus quantity is less than zero.

¹⁰⁶ Professor Brown, I think, is in error when he attributes to the poet the extreme view that "salvation is not at all a matter of merit." (*Op. cit.*, p. 132). Merit does count:

'þe ryȝtwys man schal se hys face.' (l. 675).

The poet's position is not absolute, but comparative.

The child in question may have really lived and died; she may have been the poet's own daughter.¹⁰⁷ The issue has undoubtedly a certain literary interest. Modern readers would, I think, prefer a genuine elegy to a homily in the form of an elegy,—even if the two were verbally identical. We have a conviction that “sincerity”—meaning literal truth to fact—must somehow tell. But in the case of the *Pearl*, as in that of certain other medieval works,¹⁰⁸ an altogether false dilemma has been vehemently debated. Either the *Pearl* is an elegy, or it is an allegory. If one grasps the second horn of the dilemma, and declares the poem an allegory, then *ipso facto* he must admit that the lamented one is no really-truly child at all, but a mere personification—like Boethius's Lady Philosophy or Bunyan's Giant Despair. The fallacy of this dilemma has been so often exposed, that it is incomprehensible how learned critics should be still guilty of it; but they are. To such as remain stiff-necked in heresy I would commend the work so often cited in this article, that of Albertus Magnus in praise of the Virgin Mary. It is a rich and illuminating corrective of the idea of allegory represented in the *Roman de la Rose*. According to Albertus, Mary is “figured” in nearly every person or thing mentioned in Scripture. She is figured for instance, in the “hortus conclusus” of *Cantic.* iv, 12; rather, she is that “garden inclosed.” Albertus then proceeds to enumerate and describe in 225 quarto pages the symbolic properties, delights, scents, meteorology, flora, and fauna of Mary quâ Garden. It is a huge allegory, but Mary is no mere personification of a Garden. Her historical reality remains unimpeached. Again, to take an illustration from another quarter, in Dante's allegorical interpretation of Lucan's account of Martia's return to Cato in her old age, Cato is said to signify God. Would Dante have us believe that Lucan's Cato was not the real Cato? He himself answers the question: “What earthly man was more worthy

¹⁰⁷ That the babe was a girl might be argued from ll. 447-448:

‘Alle þat may þerinne aryve

Of alle þe reme is quen oþer kyng.’

The procession later described (sts. xcii-xciii) is altogether of *maidens* exactly like the heroine, “þe Lambes vyueȝ.” (l. 785). This discrepancy is not explained.

¹⁰⁸ Dante's *Vita Nuova*, for instance.

to signify God than Cato? Surely no one."¹⁰⁹ So might the father say of his innocent and baptized babe that no one was more worthy to signify a bride of the Lamb. She who on earth had been to his heart the pearl of great price, more precious than all his earthly goods, herself now possessed the more truly divine jewel which is the 'open sesame' of heaven, which is also symbol of the lucid sphere of heaven. And he meets her there in vision, transformed, a virgin, into the image of the blessed Virgin, that most precious pearl for which God gave even His divine all,—His Son on the Cross. So once again, the poet's babe is not only the exemplum of his sermon, but also example for him and all others. Only by humbling himself as this little child, by sacrifice of all else regaining his lost innocence, may he enter into the kingdom where she is. So the "pearl" takes on still another signification: it is his lost innocence as well as his lost innocent. And in this aspect, his lament is that of the contrite heart groping in the darkness for its lost hope.

A medieval symbol of this kind is like a crystal of many facets. Though each facet may reflect but one object, the symbol as a whole may at the same time reflect many objects. The "fourfold sense" in allegorical interpretation is only a limited and systematized application of this multiple reflection, or reference, of a symbol. Diametrically opposed in principle are the fixed and univocal personifications of the *Roman de la Rose*.

I recognize that I have far from exhaustively discussed the symbolism of the *Pearl*. I have not touched, for instance, on the richly symbolic background. But if I may have successfully indicated a profitable direction of study, my hope is more than fulfilled.

JEFFERSON B. FLETCHER

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¹⁰⁹ *Conv.* IV, xxviii, 121-123.